

The Valley of the Kings Massacre

A/N: I loved Jbern's take on cursebreaking and DrT's take on ancient Egyptians who survive into the present day. Here's my take on some of these ideas.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry Potter walked to the top of the hill and looked down the other side to the 'East Valley' where a couple thousand non-magicals were gazing at various sites in the Valley of the Kings. He sat down and watched the ignorant goggle at the few poor sites they were allowed to see.

How little they knew.

The Muggles knew that Egypt had bloody, warring history for five thousand years before Rome was ever founded. They knew all about the Pharaohs who rose to power; all about the religion they followed that stressed immortality for a select, privileged few. They came to see the final resting places of the rulers of this ancient land and wondered that any of them could believe in immortality.

Of course, Harry and the few magicals who were interested knew better. The principals of immortality through magical practice had begun in Egypt. Indeed, the priests of old had learned more, and discarded more, of the practical considerations of making and maintaining a soul container than any people since.

A woman – Harry identified her by the scent of her perfume – walked up behind Harry and sat down next to him. "You ready to crack into it?"

Harry looked over at Tracey Davis and nodded. "You're impatient."

"My contract ends in four weeks, Harry. I would like my name to be on a new discovery, if we can manage it."

"The elves finish unblocking that room?"

Harry used elves bonded to his family line on his digs. He used mercenaries as protection. He trained his own cursebreakers up to his required standard; those with four years at a Gringotts program

knew next to nothing unfortunately. He used lethal warding schema to keep people out of his business. He had been burnt too many times not to learn from his mistakes.

"Yup."

"Everyone finish breakfast."

"Just waiting on you."

Harry got to his feet as another wave of non-magicals entered the East Valley below him. They must have just left a river cruise boat or something.

"Let's get to it," Harry said.

"I thought you'd sit up here all day."

"It's important to remember why we do this."

"I never had that lesson."

Harry shook his head. "It's not something I can tell you, Tracey. You've got to learn it for yourself or it's just another cheap bauble to be discarded later."

She rolled her eyes at her boss. She followed him down the hill.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry Potter, age 18, had no clue what he was supposed to do. He had a godson he needed to spoil once a week or so. He had an estate worth several million pounds, once he had converted his goblin gold to muggle currency. He had a home in a seedy part of London that he didn't like to visit.

He had a lot of time on his hands and few friends to spend it with. Hermione had gone back to Hogwarts to finish her schooling. Ron had followed her, thinking more with his todger than his brain. Ginny was waiting for him to restart their relationship. But Harry was feeling exhausted with magic.

So, he reverted to his roots, his non-magical roots. He paid a tutor to get him up to snuff for his GCSEs. That took a year. Then he did A levels. He scored well enough to get a place at University College, London. He was twenty-one when he became a student.

He came to hate London as seen from a student's eye. He grabbed onto the first opportunity he found to leave and went on a dig with a drunken sot of a professor to Amarna in Egypt.

That settled it for him.

He did his degree in three years and began touring the world after that. He'd spend a couple months a year in Egypt and the rest of the time he'd be in the great museums of the world that had Egyptian collections – that had stolen valuables from tombs and proudly displayed them.

His first breakthrough came when he walked through the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The tomb raiders working for the MFA had dismantled an entire tomb and reassembled it inside the museum.

Harry walked inside the small room and was stunned. He could see all the glyphs noted by the placards, but he could see other symbols that his fellow visitors didn't seem to notice. He returned again and again and copied down the signs.

They didn't correspond to the known hieroglyphics.

They didn't correspond to any language Harry could find.

He returned to Egypt and spent weeks inside the Pyramids. He went to the Valley of the Kings and examined the hieroglyphs there. Nothing. He found nothing of the unusual symbols he had seen at Boston.

His next clue had come two years later when he went through the remains of the necropolis at Thebes. Inside the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut he came across more of the unusual runes. This time he figured out that they weren't just words: they had a distinct magical effect. They drove the curious out of the hallway within a few minutes.

Harry had to use his middling Occlumency to remain in place.

The runes were still powered and were meant to keep people from reading what was written in the hallway. Harry took pictures and spent a few weeks translating it later.

The hallway hieroglyphs – the ones warding over later – spoke of seven valleys of kings and priests entombed.

The current thinking on the Valley of the Kings – just across the Nile from the necropolis – was that there were two valleys.

Where were the other five valleys?

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry Potter, now 47, had found 82 previously undiscovered tombs over the last eighteen years. He had considered working with Gringotts because of their reputation training cursebreakers, but he had been screwed over badly on his first assignment as an apprentice – a nearly fatal mistake. It had seemed intentional, probably payback for Harry breaking into the London branch, entering a high-security vault, and then flying a dragon out of Gringotts to escape capture.

In the years since, Harry had killed seventy-one Gringotts goblins out tomb raiding. They had nearly gotten him so many years ago so he felt nothing at ending the lives of the little vermin.

Today he was entering what was probably the last of the tombs in the final (or fifth) Valley of the Priests.

The trick to this final tomb was that it had to be entered from a different tomb. It did not have its own entrance, at least not one Harry or his team had discovered.

That meant a lot to Harry. Something hidden this way usually meant a lot of valuable material. For priests, of course, knowledge tended to be of greater value than gold or lapis lazuli, so the haul was mostly magically preserved scrolls or ritual objects or texts inscribed on walls that didn't exist anywhere else. The magically inclined priesthood did not mummify bodies, Harry had discovered, because they had unlocked the principle of soul containers.

He had seventeen of the devices locked away in a magically secure storehouse in the United Kingdom. But this hidden passage could bring more of the devices into his hands or perhaps scrolls on magical topics or even something not yet seen before.

The entrance to the putative new tombs was hidden in a room filled with thousand-year-old construction debris. He'd walked past the room a thousand times over the years unable to find access points to what his magical sonar spells told him was at least one more tunnel leading deeper into the mountain.

Tracey Davis gathered the team together.

"Alright, quiet down. We're finally ready for a breach. Most of you were here two years ago when we did the hidden sections of PV12. It was trapped to hell and back."

Aldozy began smirking at some of the younger cursebreakers. They hadn't been present for that misbegotten attempt.

"The order is like this: Mallows and Belfry will step slowly at the front checking for magic residuals and runes and all the rest. Davis will be next, taking photographs of the glyphs and runes so she can translate them when we get back to base camp. I'll be next shielding the front team. Breckinridge, Cutler, and Aldozy will be behind me. I want three of the rest of you guarding the entrance at all times, switch in and out, and stay fresh of mind. Teddy? Teddy! You'll be doing water runs from the camp up to the guards. Right? Tomorrow we'll switch the teams up so no one gets bored, right?"

No one objected, not even Teddy Lupin who was still training under Harry to be a cursebreaker. They had three linguists here, but Harry usually let Davis go in first as she had been his first hire. She had just murdered her first husband and was bored so Harry got her to swear a magical oath to keep her wand pointed away from Harry and to maintain his secrets. It took him three months to teach her the standard hieroglyphics. She had been working off and on for him for seventeen years. She had enough breaks in between digs to marry and bury four more wizards.

Harry led them inside PV 45 and pulled out his standard wand, what had once been called the Elder Wand, and carefully began to cut out the mud bricks that made up the rear wall of the small chamber.

Aldozy levitated them to an out-of-the-way corner. Tracey Davis took video of the opening using a non-magical camcorder. Wendy Ashman, another of the linguists, did the still photography.

They had no permits from the magical or non-magical Egyptian governments to do any of this. That was why Harry had so many mercenaries with him and hid five valleys under thick obscuring wards. Even so, they had a brush with a disaster usually twice a season.

The last time, the Egyptian non-magical military had been doing a search-and-rescue and had basically hit up against the wards and been unable to move forward. Their maps said there was a road, but they couldn't see one.

That had taken a good deal of obliviation to sort out.

Harry was glad to be getting down to the last few bits of his project. He was getting ready to retire from this line of work.

He cut away the last brick and waved the cursebreakers into the dark hallway. Mallovs, a lean Brit who had been with the team three years, walked in first. Belfry, a first year employee out of Canada, went in next. Davis waited a few seconds, listening for any screams of terror, before she followed them in.

Harry was right behind them all.

They covered eight hundred feet in the first hour. Harry let Davis document everything, but it didn't stop him from looking. He saw a dozen runes in the hallways he had never seen before.

It sent more than one chill down his back. This site was very important. That was saying something because it appeared to be just a bricked off hallway leading off PV45. The site they had just left was eighty-four thousand square feet in size, massive by any estimate.

Now Harry was wondering if PV 45 had been built just to hide this hallway. It was clearly older, cut hundreds or perhaps even a thousand years before PV 45. There had been lots of interest in PV 45, but nothing new. Here, within a single massive hallway, Harry had added to his knowledge base within the first hour.

Davis sped up ahead of him.

"Keep it steady," Harry hissed out. He didn't like to yell, not if it were possible there were bats up ahead.

"Mallows. Grady Mallows, stop." That was Belfry's voice.

Harry stopped walking. He saw all three of the people ahead of him begin to run. It'd be one thing if they were running back toward the exit, but they were running off down the hallway.

Harry snapped off stunners at Davis, dropping her, Belfry, stopping him cold, and Mallows. His last spell was dead center, but Mallows just disappeared in the murky dark ahead.

"Fuck."

Harry waved up Aldozy and his team. They used thin magical spells to pull Davis and Belfry back to apparent safety. Harry waited until the cleared out before he sent a denser spell forward looking for Mallows. Harry and Brian Jennings Thompson, a cursebreaker he'd worked with for a decade, had developed it but never released it to the public.

It was like a kind of magical rope. Harry had control over it, could feel where it was at, and could even order it to hook onto things.

He discovered, in short order, the hole in the middle of the hall. He sent the magical rope down the hole. One hundred feet. Two hundred. Three – four – five. Mallows had fallen down a six hundred foot hole. His death had been instantaneous.

Harry used the magical rope to encircle the man's broken body and haul it back up the well. He draped it with a conjured sheet long before it became visible to anyone else.

While all this was going on, Harry was staring at the runes just in front of him, on either side, above him, and even carved under the dust on the floor.

These were more runes he didn't recognize.

PV 82 had just claimed its first victim based on unknown magic. Harry was at the rear of the general withdrawal. He'd left Belfry and Davis stunned for now until they were in a safer place.

God only knew what sort of runes they were and what sort of curse had just been laid on his people.

It took until noon the next day before Harry understood the effect. It hadn't been a curse per se. The runes had the effect of creating euphoria and massive overconfidence in anyone passing by them.

Cautious people stopped looking for traps; slow moving people begin to run toward a well they aren't looking for. It was a perfectly designed dead fall trap.

Harry gave his people two days off to regroup.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

A month passed and they had gotten in only five exploration days. They had mapped out a mile of tunnels so far but had not yet found a single room, a single tomb, nothing they were expecting. The tunnels behaved in unexpected ways, going up at a three degree incline rather than down, twisting and turning in unbelievable ways. They narrowly avoided three more dead falls and several sets of dangerous runes.

Each cursebreaker going inside PV82 now wore a necklace full of runes meant to cancel out the standard runes Harry had already broken and the hastily crafted counters to the constantly discovered new runes inside the hallway.

Harry had now doubled the number of Egyptian runes he knew about.

They were getting more and more vicious, too.

He got the team up and ready for the sixth day of exploration. Davis was rotating back in. Aldozy was at the front with Cutler. Belfry had resigned weeks earlier, but Harry couldn't say anything bad about a man almost killed by a runic ward three thousand years old.

"We're going to walk it slowly. Let's look at the walls carefully this time. No one in their right mind ever build a twisting mile-long tunnel. We're missing rooms. They've somehow been obscured or hidden from us," Harry said.

"I think I saw something at the overconfidence ward," Davis said. "I went back to the photos last night. I think we should look there, Potter."

This was her last day inside the tomb as she had yet another wedding to attend to in Bristol. Harry expected her to rejoin the dig in a few months.

"Sounds good to me," Harry said. He gave the nod to Aldozy. They took two hours to get back to the first set of dangerous wards. They all wore nullifiers keyed to these wards, but they did not truly understand how they worked.

"That's it," Davis said, pointing at a chipped spot in the paint. Aldozy cleared away the dust in the area. Harry got down on his hands and knees. He took out a small chisel and ran it along the floor separating the painted plaster.

"Excellent eyes," Harry said. "This wall is native stone. This part is plaster over laminated papyrus."

"What?" Aldozy asked.

Harry nodded. This sort of thing should have rotted away thousands of years ago. "Hundreds of sheets of papyrus woven or glued together somehow. It's a door."

It took the team three hours to find the edges, break the plaster without destroying the writing upon it, and open the strange door.

The room they discovered was massive, eighteen thousand square feet. It had fifteen tunnels leading off in every direction.

It was a tremendous discovery, what with the odd door that was made from papyri that had been written upon. If they could remove the individual sheets from each other, they would have a library's worth of Egyptian texts.

The room contained little writing, but dramatic scenes painted on the walls. There were thirty news runes with unclear meaning lurking about. The statuary in the room was crafted from precious and semi-precious materials. None of the statues had glyphs identifying them.

This room – had Harry been selling anything he found – would have gone on the black market for half a billion pounds, if sold slowly over time. Harry had seen every major and minor Egyptian trove in the world and none of them had anything like what he discovered in the room.

It also gave him a headache. He had secret doors to search out, new runes to avoid, and a ridiculous amount of new pathways to track and map.

It was beginning to feel like Harry had unearthed the world's first and largest underground maze.

Ever since the TriWizard Tournament, Harry loathed mazes.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Exploration day 17 dawned. Tracey Davis was back from England but was in a foul mood. Her husband had, apparently, died of natural causes before rewriting his will in her benefit.

That was a problem selecting ancient wizards as prey.

Harry woke and saw that Wendy Ashman had left his bed in the middle of the night. She was another linguist, but she did not murder her husbands so Harry permitted himself to enjoy her company now and again.

He knew he needed to settle down at some point, but he was still so driven by Egypt that his desire for discovery still override his need for progeny.

He got up and walked to the self-updating map he had hung in his tent. It was looking more and more like a maze. One of the tunnels actually veered off and went underneath the Nile to the necropolis at Thebes. There had been several cave-ins on the Thebes side so they did not know where it was meant to exit.

Other tunnels linked up to other of the tomb complexes. Harry had been shocked and furious that he had finally found these hidden passages when he had missed them for so long.

He eventually tracked down the runes that had obscured the passages to his searching for so long. Once they started wearing nullifiers for that rune, the search had gone much quicker.

They had uncovered forty-nine chambers off the main hallway. They had marked but not fully mapped a total of seven hundred four additional halls and ninety one secondary chambers. Harry figured it would take years to map everything.

The one trend he was aware of was that most of the tunnels ran back into the 'Great Pyramid Peak,' as it was called around these parts. Most thought this valley had been selected for tomb building primarily because the tallest peak looked rather like Khafra's pyramid.

Harry dressed and ate before walking out of his tent. The rest of his crew were still rousing themselves. He had a new cursebreaker who had done his four years with Gringotts before getting the hell out of there. Harry had hired him precisely because of the young man's disgusted view of goblins.

"You ready, Cartwell?"

"Yes, sir."

"Call me Potter, not sir."

"Yes, sir." The kid had a stupid grin on his face.

Harry just nodded.

"Aldozy showed me the map last night. It looks like miles of tunnels down there."

"We've uncovered at least two hundred miles," Harry said. He and his team had run the magical ropes down each one, but hadn't walked more than a couple of them.

"What were they hiding down there?"

"Some of the treasures are grander than anything the pharaohs had."

"But the treasure rooms are right off the main hall," Cartwell said.

"Smart assessment. I'm working off the idea that priests valued magical knowledge more than anything else. They left the gold out for any grave robbers along with too many tunnels to follow. The good stuff is well hidden."

"Right." The young man looked at the external entrance to PV82 they had finally uncovered (it had required one solid day of cutting curses, alternating people out every thirty minutes, to cut out the sealing stones that someone put into place). The hallway they had first discovered had turned out to be another tributary. The real main hallway was the width of ten men. The walls there were adorned with gold and precious stones. "What will you do with all this?"

Harry smiled. Everyone asked him that question. "What do you think I should do?"

"I'd like a cut if you sell it."

"Your contract specified there was no profit sharing. It's not because I'm greedy. It's because I'm not selling any objects we find inside the tombs."

"How you paying people then?" Cartwell asked.

"What do you think?"

"Family money?"

Harry shook his head. "You come up with an answer and I'll confirm if you're right."

"Something shady?"

Harry shrugged.

"I'll figure it out," Cartwell said. He went off to talk with Teddy Lupin. The thirty-year old metamorphmagus just smiled and walked away.

Harry counted heads and lead them inside when the number hit fifteen. Wendy Ashman, the last to join the group, got a special wink from Harry. She had dealt with him long enough not to blush.

Harry walked inside next to Marcy Beauvois, his lead archivist. "You think we'll stumble across something great?"

She shook her head. "No. Not until you've pulled out all your hair looking for it."

Harry laughed. "You working with Tracey on the new runes?"

"We don't understand the language at all. It's completely unlike hieroglyphs. And we don't have a..."

"...Rosetta Stone," Harry said, finishing her lament. Harry had gone back to the British Museum to look at the ugly stone several times to see if it had anything related to these runes hiding on it. No such luck.

"You've got all these texts in here in standard hieroglyphics, we're capturing all of it for translation, but with one percent of it done none of it comes from the Book of the Dead or any other funerary texts we've ever seen. So far what we've got reads like extended biographies: names and birthplaces of priests, their levels of training, who they served, what mysteries they performed..."

"But no guide to these goddamned runes that litter the walls?"

"Not yet."

"This magic is beyond ancient, it's still functioning, and we're barely able to move around it here without triggering something new. It's fascinating and frustrating in equal measure," Harry said.

"The magic mixing with the runes doesn't work like any other rune base I know of. The control runes, powering runes, trigger runes, none of that is in play here. The triggers are the controllers – sometimes. Other times it's unconnected sections that work together somehow. None of it makes sense, Harry."

"Get it all recorded. We'll be careful to analyze it."

The day ended early, as so many of the exploration days did, when two photographers – Wendy Ashman among them – triggered what turned out to be a room-wide confounding ward. Some people began vomiting on themselves from the apparent spinning they felt; others passed out when their blood pressures dropped, like they'd been in shock. Harry had a splitting migraine and extended waking nightmares of a returned Voldemort burning London.

Cartwell, who'd been working in the hall at the time, got Harry out first. It took them twenty minutes to clear all affected out of the room.

Wendy had asphyxiated from her own vomit by the time Cartwell got her out.

Harry kept his tears to himself until late that night. Then he let everything out, sobbing.

The next day he sent his godson to work in the Golden Valley disabling the traps in the largest tomb complex in that valley. He had portions of his team all over the five valleys under his control, but he needed to make sure his godson stayed as safe as possible.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The team took a contracted two month break shortly after the disaster in Room Y3. Harry took Wendy's body back to Britain himself and answered as many questions as he could from her family. He did tell them she had been translating hieroglyphics for his cursebreaking team.

He returned her remains and handed over the contracted payment in case of her death.

They had not welcomed Harry to remain and grieve with them.

He returned to 12 Grimmauld Place and holed himself in the library for a day. He went over the volumes he had purchased on contemporary ward crafting. Useless. He looked through the books compiled over several hundred years on lethal wards.

Finally in one of the Black books he found a description for what had happened: layered confounding wards. Two or more runes could be

active at any spot in the room. Harry had had some sort of headache inducing rune, plus a living nightmare rune. Both of these curses had long been attributed to Egyptian sorcerers, but none of the magic was believed to have survived to the present.

Wendy had been subject to an entirely different set, ones that combined to incapacitate her in her own fluids.

Harry closed up the book and went to visit his friend Hermione Weasley.

He knew that Ron was at work this time of day. He also knew that Ginny was in France this week. He needed to convince Hermione of something and didn't care for any obstacles.

He knocked on her door, but got no answer. He stepped around to her fenced yard and opened the gate. She was back there, sunning, topless.

"Button up, sunshine, your husband's coming."

Hermione blinked and looked over at Harry. "Not in me he hasn't."

Harry smiled. He felt more than a little sadness at the loveless marriage Hermione was stuck inside of. She said she remained for her children, but both Hugo and Rose had graduated from Hogwarts.

She had another reason to remain. Harry had no clue what it might be.

She put her top back on and climbed into a bathrobe. "You want a lemonade?"

"Please."

She filled a glass from a pitcher and pushed it to him. "Two glasses. You expecting someone?"

"Perhaps."

That amused Harry. "What's his name?"

"I'm not talking about my love life with you, Harry. Now, what brings you to my backyard?"

He shrugged. "I need to pick your mind."

"How's that different from since I met you?"

She had corrected years of his homework at Hogwarts, after all. "It's not. I also have a job to offer."

Hermione shook her head. "Not interested in Egypt."

"The job is here."

"Doing what?"

Harry took a moment to consider how to frame his story. "I need you to edit a book I've written."

"Book?" A faint gleam of interest appeared in her eyes.

"About my work in Egypt."

"I wasn't completely sure you could write," she said.

"I'm not so sure, either, that's why I need an editor."

She smiled. "You finally going to tell me what you're doing there – or how you're not destitute after spending all the Potter money?"

"I am ten times wealthier now than I was when I got the family vault, Hermione."

"You tomb raiding?"

Harry nodded. "But I haven't sold a single item."

"Where's the money come from?"

"I've come across quite a few lost bits of knowledge. You know how the Egyptians got so good living in basically a desert? Drought resistant crops enhanced by their magical priests...."

"You!"

Harry nodded. "The Tausen Corporation."

"The E.U. is up in arms about that. They can't figure out how it can work so well and claim no genetic modification. It's illegal to sell magical items to the Muggles, Harry...."

"Nothing I give them is magical. I do my work on the seed plants and there is no residual magic in the grain when I harvest it or sell it as seed."

She scowled at him. "I should have known it was something like that. You're robbing tombs to get the seeds...."

"No, you're not listening. I didn't use the seed I found. I used the knowledge...."

"Books?" She was interested now. And possibly aroused.

"Of a sort."

"Gods, Harry. You disappear for twenty years into the desert and turn everything upside down."

"Will you help?"

"I'll need to see everything you've done before I agree to anything. And I expect to be paid this time, no more sponging off me like in school."

"You'll be paid...."

"I've had enough with deadbeats."

Harry thought of Ron and shook his head. "I'll be back for a week. Can you meet me at my office tomorrow morning?"

"You have an office?"

He smiled at her. "Of course."

"Where?"

"It's in a warehouse in Bethnal Green."

"That's a shit neighborhood...."

"With the warding I've done not even the Bank of England is safer."

She nodded. Harry pulled a card out of his pocket. "This has the address. Nine o'clock?"

She nodded and looked toward the house.

Harry had heard the sound of apparition. "I'm just leaving, Terry, she's all yours."

Harry got up and walked out of the backyard.

"Was that really Harry Potter?" a man's voice inquired.

Hermione didn't answer the question. "I put on edible tanning lotion. Start licking it off at my shoulder."

"Yes, Mistress."

Harry shivered at the overheard conversation. It was a bit like imagining McGonagall taking a lover: very possible, but disturbing.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

After the break the entire team had spent one week revising their safety and security practices. They'd failed in Room Y3.

The next seven exploration days went off without problem, other than doubling the unexplored miles of tunnels on the maps.

Harry decided to move the focus down hall H54 and concentrate in rooms W73 and W78.

Cartwell, Braugher, and Harry cleared the path to the rooms. They found one runed area and cracked it open to discover a new room. Harry shook his head and marked it on the map. They'd have to come back to it.

The three cursebreakers got in W73 and scouted for runes. They didn't see any on the walls so they sent the all clear. The rest of the team had been waiting in the hall and arrived in a few seconds. It took only an hour to document the walls, identify five passageways out of the room, and move on to W78.

The second room was much larger than the first, eight thousand square feet. It contained what looked like a half dozen ceremonial altars and carved stone containers. It looked like a ritual room.

"Be careful in here. Double careful." Harry had not yet seen a room like this one in the complex.

He turned to examine the wall and saw a new series of runes. He pulled out a pad and began drawing them. He wondered if there was a finite alphabet for whatever this language was.

He waved over Tracey Davis and had her start working on documenting the new runes. "Great," she hissed.

Harry moved anticlockwise around the room. He found a second section of new runes.

"Start pulling back, folks."

People began walking back to the door. One person, one of Marcy's assistants, cut through the middle of the room. Harry saw the flash of a rune activating.

Several of the pots on the altars began to smoke.

"Bubblehead Charms. Now!"

Harry summoned the assistant who'd activated the rune to his side of the room. He carried her crumpled body out.

Aldozy and his team had an impermeable shield up moments after Harry got into the hall.

"Poison gas?" Marcy asked.

Harry nodded.

Marcy knelt next to her assistant and checked her breathing. "We really should have a dedicated healer," she said.

"You think I haven't tried to find one? Most of them are lazy sods who want an easy life. I offered adventure and they ran screaming."

"You should have lied, then."

Harry smiled. He looked into the room as all of the pots were emitting gas now. It had been a nested activation. "How many thousands of priests must have helped build this place?" Harry wondered out loud.

"It could have just been one priest who lived for two thousand years," Marcy joked.

Harry had a chill run down his back. Yes, it could very well be that, too.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The runic lexicon was up to four hundred seventy characters. They hadn't discovered a new one in two months. Harry and his team all wore ridiculous necklaces with hundreds of nullifiers on them. He still insisted on stringent security measures. They still accidentally turned on a trap every other exploration day, but no one had died in four months. The teams in the other valleys also wore nullifiers even though they hadn't discovered any new runes out there in over a year.

There was a fair amount of grumbling, but Harry was glad to hear it if it meant he didn't lose any more of his team members.

He ate his breakfast while looking at the map, inspired by the Marauder's Map of Hogwarts. He tapped his wand on the paper and turned on the three dimensional mode, a feature that the Marauders had never achieved. He set the image to a slow twirl and looked at the thousand-plus fissures cut into the living stone. They'd only found a handful of collapsed tunnels in all their exploration.

The person or persons who built this place really knew what they were doing. It had been built for the ages and the oldest discovered parts had survived almost three thousand years so far.

Today they were going to explore a new corridor. They'd need to find the rooms off of it, if any, and open them. They'd be marked on the map, but not entered, not when the backlog of places to visit was nearing a thousand.

Harry ate his cereal and watched his model. He saw one of the tunnels running off into the Great Pyramid Peak in a way that none of the other tunnels did. He stopped the model and looked at the number: hallway H1C.

He wrote it down on his schedule. He thought it might be interesting to try to clear it the next exploration day. He shed the robe he was wearing and got dressed. He was outside just before Cartwell left his tent.

He nodded to Aldozy who led the group inside the tomb.

It took them ninety minutes to arrive at the day's work site. The complex of chambers and hallways was immense and getting more so every exploration.

The expedition ended abruptly because the wells on either end of the hallway began expelling water at a rapid rate. Harry looked around for any active runes, but couldn't see anything.

This is was all too new and terrifying.

"Protect yourselves. Sticking charms on your feet and bubblehead charms for breathing. Now!" Harry called out. He felt the warm water wash over him. He caught young Fern Tremblay who hadn't heard his instructions or couldn't pull off a sticking charm. At least the kid had a bubble over his head.

After the water rose to the top of the hall, Harry gestured for everyone to follow. He released his sticking charm and began swimming out. He looked behind him several times to see some people struggling. He felt pity for them. Learning to swim under pressure was not a lot of fun.

They went more than a mile before they found a magical barrier keeping the water back. Harry corresponded with Aldozy with hand

signs for a moment before they decided to punch a hole in the ceiling and cut a bypass up and over the shield.

Thirty minutes later Harry pulled out the last team member. He studied the shield until Marcy Beauvais came to collect him for a team meeting. "They're scared," she said.

"I'm terrified. It's a bloody miracle we don't have a lot of dead."

Marcy nodded.

"Anyone talking about walking away?"

"You're kind of a heartless prick, Harry."

He nodded. "I know."

"A lot of terrified people make a lot of bad decisions. You need to step up."

Harry walked out of the main tunnel entrance and located his team near the main tent. "Let's have a talk."

It wasn't a pleasant lunch, but it was productive. He hoped.

After, Harry went over to the site where Teddy was working and taught him the magical rope spell. He would protect Teddy with his last breath: it had been the only thing Andromeda asked before she passed on, her heart well and truly broken over the deaths of her husband and daughter.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The end result was three walk-offs. Harry was pleased that he only lost three. He feared that all of them would break their contracts. He gave the rest two weeks off to make sure of their commitment. He phrased it as 'everyone needing some R & R.'

In truth, he was rattled by the last trap. He didn't know how it was triggered or how the hall for a mile or more was sealed and filled with water.

It was a piece of magic he hadn't ever contemplated.

He chatted with Hermione about it. She had, of course, yelled at him for almost dying before becoming enamored of understanding the magic behind it.

Harry also looked up his old Professor, Filius Flitwick, who had retired to a small cottage in the Cotswolds.

He knocked on the spry man's door and was invited inside.

"I had wondered what happened to you, Mr. Potter."

"I got busy."

That earned Harry a wry smile. "Well, I am glad you could stop by. I had long wondered if I'd get a chance to talk with you again."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I had wanted to tutor you in some dueling fundamentals in school, but Albus forbade me from offering. Given all you went through at Hogwarts, I regretted not making the offer anyway."

Harry smiled. "I thank you for thinking of the offer. I could have used some lessons."

"That you could. Now I suspect you could teach me a few things."

Harry shook his head. "No. No, I don't know about that. I find myself learning something new almost every day. Some of it is stuff I wish no one had ever invented."

Filius nodded, awaiting whatever Harry had come to say. He had likely had many former students come by to ask him questions.

"I'm doing some interesting work in Egypt..."

"Ah, lovely country." Filius began to nod. "Evil history, of course, but taking a trip down the Nile is one of the true pleasures of life."

Harry had lived in Egypt for almost twenty years but he had never taken a Nile cruise. He did not tell Flitwick that, however.

"I came across some kind of runic warding or complex charm that has me baffled. A long tunnel filled with water and sealed at either end. I was inside it when it happened."

Flitwick stopped smiling. "I had thought you brighter, Mr. Potter. Going up against Egyptian curses and wards is not a wise thing."

"It's become a passion."

Flitwick shook his head. "I'd suggest that you do not tempt fate again. I did a stint with Gringotts years ago before I went on the dueling circuit. I was the low man on the totem pole so I was outside doing guard duty when eight people – far more experienced than I – perished in a little hole in the ground. We ended up flooding the tunnel to extract their bodies. Crushed by some trap or some bit of magic I'm not aware of."

"You made a study of Egyptian magic?"

"I know more than any book will tell you," Flitwick said. "But I know almost nothing. No one does. They seem to have taken the knowledge with them to their graves."

That was, of course, the conventional wisdom, but Harry didn't think it was the full truth. "I will be publishing a book in a few years, Professor. I think it will add something considerable to our understanding of the ancient magics."

Flitwick did lean forward at that. "I wondered when we might see a great work out of you, Harry. Not that the Battle of Hogwarts wasn't. Great, that is. But something permanent, a book. How wonderful. I think you would have been better served in my house than in Minerva's. She was always too hands off with her students."

Harry nodded, but didn't indicate whether he agreed or not.

"There was a rumor Gringotts was running down years ago. We were told to examine the necropolis at Thebes for signs of a magical priesthood."

Harry smiled. "I think my book might discuss that topic in some detail."

"I hope the knowledge doesn't cost more than you can pay, Harry."

"I hope that, too. Thank you for the advice."

"I fear you will not take it, of course. But you're welcome for what little I know. Let me know when the book comes out and I will head down to Diagon Alley to pick up a copy."

"I have Hermione working as an editor on the project."

Flitwick nodded. "Ah, another Ravenclaw mis-sorted."

"I'll tell her you said so."

"I told her myself years ago," the diminutive professor said.

Harry left after that and spend the rest of the week checking various libraries – magical and non – he could access. He also spent a few hours with Hermione listening to her suggestions about his book. She was proposing to break it into three volumes.

Harry spent his second week trying to decide what to do. Should he push to unravel the maze? Could he bear any more deaths?

He didn't know.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry ate breakfast in the main tent with his godson. The young man was agitating to come back to the main exploration. Harry remained firm that Teddy had a lot more to learn.

Teddy, of course, disagreed.

They parted with some hard feelings. They'd be fine again tomorrow, though. It was always this way.

The day was scheduled for the first exploration since the break, but he wanted to have a conversation before he made the final decision. He hadn't even replaced the three who had ended their contracts with him.

Tracey Davis sat down at his table as Harry was beginning to clear what he and his godson hadn't eaten.

"We going in?" she asked.

"We need to talk about that, I think."

"What else would we do?"

"How many tombs do you see around here? All of them could use additional work, Davis."

"Boring."

Harry shrugged and levitated his bowl of oatmeal over to a sidetable. The conversation about whether to get in today was in full swing by the time he finished his last spoonful.

"Should we put it to a vote?" Harry asked.

"Aren't you paying the bills?" Marcy asked.

"I am. But I want fully informed consent on this. This isn't just looking for and avoiding traps any more. I don't have the slightest clue how that water trap was triggered. That's what makes me nervous. If there runes we could avoid, fine, let's add more nullifiers. But I dumped my memory into a pensieve and watched it several times. I still don't know the chain of events that started this."

"Could it be time delayed or a regular occurrence we've never seen before?" Marcy asked.

Harry shrugged. "What's the period, then? If it's an auto cleaning function or something, why's it so dusty in there? And how do we know to avoid it next time?"

The next half dozen suggestions of what happened were all equally unsatisfying. Harry had another idea, but he refused to voice it. He was concerned that there could be an intelligence somewhere inside the tomb that had triggered the water trap. A horcrux controlling things maybe – or a ghost or poltergeist?

Eventually the meeting ended with a decision: they were going back in. Harry had planned for that and selected hallway H1C for exploration.

It took an hour to get to an access point for H1C.

Along the way Harry and Aldozy found seven more rooms hidden behind plaster. The odd thing was where the hallway went: it went up, up, up into the Great Pyramid Peak.

Three miles later the hallway ended in an obvious doorway.

"Stop," Harry called out when Cartwell reached out to open the thing.

"What?"

Harry was angry now. Livid. "You seen a door like that in this entire place yet?"

Cartwell shook his head.

Breckinridge pushed his way up to the front of the pack and began casting detection spells. "It reads as clean, Potter."

Harry shook his head. "We know that means nothing. What if there are runes underneath the plaster. Think safety folks." He pointed back down the hallway. "I want to tackle the rooms we've uncovered on this hall before we try this one..."

Marcy and Cartwell looked pissed. Davis was resigned. The rest took care to mask their opinions.

The team backtracked and cleared three small rooms. They found new runes that seemed to do nothing in each of them.

Around seven that evening – after a rare full day of exploration – the team retreated back outside.

The next morning they went back in again. There was nothing major to research – nor any new nullifiers to manufacture – so no reason not to have back-to-back exploration days.

They cleared the remaining four small rooms and found nothing of concern.

Harry led them back up to the odd ceremonial doors. He transfigured a stone into a small faceless golem and sent him to open the door.

The golem progressed into the massive room. Harry could see that it was the largest structure they'd yet come across.

Tracey Davis began snapping pictures. These ones were worth more than a thousand words.

This was the first time he'd seen statues of the Egyptian gods in this tomb complex. And what statues they were. Each one had to have at least a ton of gold in it, assuming they were only lightly gilded.

More interesting to Harry was their presence here at all; after all, the priests did not believe in the gods at all, at least the ones who decorated this complex. It had taken Harry a long time to understand that about the magical priests he had been investigating for two decades. They promoted worship of the gods among the non-magical, especially the pharaoh and his retinue, but they knew the gods did not exist. Texts inside this complex told of how this priest or that priest added onto the mythology to make a certain effect happen or to squeeze additional resources for a particular temple complex.

Harry enjoyed the thought that the pharaohs spent all they had and more in order to assure themselves a form of immortality when the priestly class – the magicals – knew how to live forever through soul containers.

The largest of the massive statues was Asari, or Osiris, from the Greek transliteration, the god of the dead. Inpu, or Anubis, Bastet, and Wadjet were the others.

The collection would be worth a couple hundred million pounds should Harry even think of auctioning them. He hadn't yet sold a thing and he wouldn't start now.

Nothing happened to the golem so Harry walked inside the chamber. He kept the rest of the party from joining him for now. He walked the perimeter of the room looking for runes.

As soon as he found the first new runes, he copied them and turned around and walked the opposite direction inside the room. He found more runes on the other side of the room and copied them down. He left the room after that.

He'd need to make up nullifiers before returning tomorrow or soon after. As Harry had the golem close the doors, he heard a loud blasting sound roar through the room. It wasn't stone moving on stone, it wasn't an explosion or an earthquake.

It sounded something like speech. It had intelligence behind it. It had intention.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

It was a week later before the team was ready to make a second run at the god-statue-room.

Harry hadn't even assigned it a number for the map. He didn't think he'd ever forget it.

The team arrived in good time. All of them went in with nullifiers for the two sets of runes Harry had found. Harry and the other cursebreakers pointed out the clear areas for documentation and analysis while they set out to identify any other unknown runes.

They found them on the walls, near the middle of the room, everywhere. The cursebreakers did not get close enough to the runes to activate them, but they still had their fingers crossed.

They spent four hours in the grandest room documenting everything inside. The statues were bejeweled and gilt. Harry didn't want anyone getting too close to them as runes could easily hide under the gilding.

They had clear paths through about twenty-five percent of the room and another pile of runes to prepare nullifiers for when everything went pear shaped.

The double doors into the room shut and a magical shield descended in front of them. The sixty foot statues began to move. Aldozy was the first to notice and called it out.

Harry turned to catch a view of it. Each of the feet was large enough to crush a man.

"In situ conjuration! Metal chains and the like. Now!"

Most of the team could make that happen, but it was to no avail. The metal automatons were far stronger than any conjured metal. Harry ordered his team across the danger zone – the unexplored area – to the next set of door. The doors were tall enough for Harry and his team to enter the next room, but not tall enough for the machines to follow. Hopefully.

Davis and Beauvais were the first across the unknown field. Anubis swiped at Davis, but she dodged the attack. Beauvais sent a banisher against Bastet which had a minor affect.

Harry conjured Fiendfyre and hoped he wasn't killing his team. He had learned to use the spell in the intervening years, but he had also seen what could happen when the spell was uncontrolled.

The fire was hot enough to begin melting Wadjet, the snake-headed goddess. But it wasn't happening fast enough.

Aldozy let loose a blast of Fiendfyre against Anubis. It distracted the automatons long enough for most everyone to make it across the room.

Harry found it a challenge to run at full speed and maintain the spell, so he was a third of the way to the door when Bastet attacked him. He switched the focus of his deadly fire spell to Bastet. Wadjet, apparently metal covering wood, was now fully engulfed.

Aldozy, standing near the door, switched his flames to the fourth automaton, Osiris. It did nothing to the largest of the devices.

Harry narrowly dodged Osiris' fist and released the Fiendfyre. He struggled to extinguish it for a moment, but it went out. Harry then went full out to the door.

He suddenly rediscovered exactly how many years he had lived on this earth. He was in good shape, but he was not in top shape. He was no longer an athlete and he wondered if that would cost him his life.

Harry made it to the next set of double doors and the others in the room pulled them shut behind him. A variety of locking and reinforcing spells hit the things. Thankfully the doors held up to the assault mounted by Osiris.

Harry collapsed on the floor. He took a headcount. All twelve had made it into the next room. But how would they get out of here? He surveyed the vastly smaller chamber, with a thousand square feet at most and twelve foot ceilings.

There was only the one door into the room, it seemed.

Harry caught his breath and looked around for Davis. "Tracey, any new runes in here?" Which was code for 'any more shit we're not expecting?'

She shook her head.

"Aldozy, do a quick check. Look for more hidden doors, too. I can't believe this is the only room in this complex with only one entrance."

"Right."

Harry rested a few more minutes before he joined the search for a way out of the room that didn't require meeting Osiris again. At least its pounding on the doors had stopped.

Cartwell came and sat next to Harry. "The Osiris drove us into this room."

Harry nodded.

"Why?"

"Why did the hall flood that day? Why did that room fill with the sounds of talking last week? There's something here we're not seeing," Harry said.

"There's a door over here," Aldozy cried out.

"Another on this side, too," Cutler said.

Harry went and examined both doors. Then he walked to the back edge of the room and looked for a third door. It wasn't hard to locate.

He pulled out his chisel and began locating the edges of the door. He took a short time before he opened it and looked inside. "Storeroom."

He walked over to Cutler's open door. "Storeroom, too?"

"Yeah."

The pair walked over to Aldozy. "Storeroom," he groused.

Harry walked into a storeroom and immediately felt an illusion latch onto his mind. It was a form of mental magic, somewhat akin to the Imperius Curse, so it took Harry only a few seconds to break it.

The storeroom disappeared entirely. He was in another hallway. "I'm fine. Stay out there. There's something I need to check in here."

"Find me some Wheat Thins," Davis called out. Her last husband had been an American wizard who'd decamped to London. He'd apparently retained a taste for the non-magical snacks of his homeland. And encouraged Davis to do the same.

Harry walked down the hallway and saw the point where the hall turned and converged with the paths leading from the other doors. All roads led to this point.

Harry had his wand out and his magic senses open. He expected trouble. He was sure he was going to find it.

He pushed open a slight door at the end of the hallway and walked inside. There was a man – a rather transparent man – dressed in the style of an Egyptian priest standing, apparently waiting for Harry.

The ghost-like creature made some gnashing noises toward Harry.

Harry began casting spells to get a sense of what this room contained. The results made Harry want to vomit.

There were 365 horcruxes in the room. Every little statue on a table registered as a soul container.

His world had almost died over a man who made a handful of the vicious little things. He had spent years collecting and segregating another 17, probably from other of the Egyptian priests. Now there was some sort of spirit here standing watch over hundreds of the goddamned things.

He eyed the ghostly figure who again shrieked at Harry. Finally the creature selected one of the horcrux statues on the table and took it to a pedestal in the corner. Harry was ready to cast a Killing Curse but what he saw stopped him in awe.

A black mist burst out of the statue and another being materialized. This one was dressed in a business suit, something that might have been popular around the Second World War.

The first ghostly figure shrieked at the second one.

The one in the business suit looked at Harry and said, "Why are you here?"

In English. In the Queen's English.

Harry almost dropped his wand in shock.

"Excuse me."

"Pradt-uln-qar said you and your people have not followed the warnings of the Great Temple. For more than a year you have not heeded our warnings."

Harry swallowed air and thought he might drown trying to process this new information.

"Why are you still alive?"

The priest dressed in a business suit looked at Harry carefully. "You are a wizard, I see. Do you understand the principle of the soul container?"

"Yes."

"Then you know I am not alive – now. But I could be very easily."

Harry nodded. The more he looked at the pair of them the more he was reminded of the young Tom Riddle boasting in the Chamber of Secrets while standing over Ginny Weasley's weakening body.

"How do you speak my language?"

"I awoke in 1905 by your calendar and spent forty-one years surveying the then-modern world for my fellow priests. I learned modern Egyptian, of course, and eight more languages. I actually learned to drive an automobile. When I had my fill and had determined that our prophecy had not yet come to pass, I returned here to rest."

Harry couldn't help have bad memories at the word prophecy.

"What are all of you waiting for?"

"You mean, why did we build the Temple of the Ten Thousand Traps?"

Harry nodded.

"That would be telling. Now, you must go away."

"How will you make me do that?"

The ethereal being grinned. "I can kill you without a problem, but I'd prefer not to have to do that."

Harry considered the priest dressed in the business suit. He had a sense of how to deal with him and the other ghost. He still needed information. "How many runes are there in your magical language?"

"Runes?"

Harry pointed at some of the writing on the wall.

"Ah. Runes. Yes, I guess I can see why you'd call it that. They are akh-ta-let, magic upon stone. It would take a priest like me twelve years of mysteries to learn all of them and how to make them work. Do you expect me to teach you our deepest mysteries when you won't be alive very soon."

Harry noticed that the old-looking ghost had activated some kind of runes. He quickly looked through the list and recognized a handful of the characters. He hoped the nullifiers around his neck would protect him against the new runes.

The original priest in the room shrieked in his language.

The one in the business suit seemed to frown. "He says you have a protective talisman on, that you are avoiding the effects of our magic." The priest sent a blast of energy at Harry, but Harry dropped to the floor.

He cast the Killing Curse at the statue on the pedestal. The priest in the business suit screamed before the smoke he was constructed from lost form and vanished.

The original priest ran for the wall. Harry cast the Killing Curse against another statue on a pedestal. Nothing. He picked another target. The last priest visible in the room screamed and vanished.

He stood up and looked at the pedestals. There were ten all together, six of them had horcrux-statues on them. Harry had destroyed three, but that left three. Was there another priest out in the world? How had a ghost-like presence learned to drive an auto, anyway?

Harry cast the green-colored curse three more times, but he felt the magic in the compound change – grow heavier – before the last curse came out of his wand.

Moments later a few statues began to smoke, then half of them, then all of them.

Harry turned and ran from the room.

Destroying the six active priests had done something – or one of the priests active in another part of the temple had activated a fail-safe.

He needed to get his team out of here now.

He ran into the small chamber and shouted at everyone, "Get up. We need to run."

"Why?" Marcy asked.

"Run!"

Harry blasted through the doors, shattering any magic his people had layered on them.

He cast four Killing Curses in six seconds against the waiting Osiris automaton. The thing finally stopped moving.

Harry waited until his team cleared the room before following them. He craned his neck to see behind him and saw a corporeal priest emerge into the room.

Something the priests had done had returned them to living bodies.

"Go! Run!"

Harry had caused all this to happen by his zeal to uncover this tomb complex and his refusal to back down. He would have to see it through to the end.

He let his people get a quarter mile ahead of him before he sped up from his jog to a full run. If he didn't screw up, he'd get his team out and perhaps survive himself.

He looked back several times. The priest at the head of the pack often changed, but the size of the pack didn't.

Harry was leading them through dozens of traps that he was protected against, but that they weren't.

He watched as they passed right through an electrocution field without a problem.

Harry ran faster. He didn't have a clue what to do except to run. He'd thought the traps would aid him.

The traps weren't affecting them. Did they have special ways to negate them?

None of it made any sense to him. None of it.

If they were magical, why weren't they attacking him? Why wasn't he attacking them?

Harry slowed a moment and cast a killing curse. The body slumped to the ground. The rest of them kept running.

None of them attacked Harry with magic.

Harry took a quarter mile to realize what that meant. They didn't attack with magic because they didn't have any right now. They had used an imperfect reembodiment technique.

He also realized that the magical runes inscribed all over the hallways and rooms he was running through only worked on magicals. Had Harry hired a bunch of Muggles to help him on his expedition, he'd have had a lot fewer problems. Fuck!

Harry turned and ran into a room with altars and jars. An idea clicked in his mind. He conjured a wall in the hallway he'd just left that would force all the muggle-priests into this room. Harry fitted himself with a bubblehead charm and an invisibility ward. He faded from view as he snapped more walls into place to block the remaining exits from the room.

Then he took his nullifier necklace off and threw it in a corner of the room. He waited until half a dozen priests entered the room before he stepped over to the runes powering the poison gas controls.

The room filled with smoke rapidly. The muggle priests slowly began running back up the hall, but Harry fanned the poisons at them. The last thirty he had to kill with cutters. His core was running low after using the Killing Curse so much that day.

He zapped off a Patronus Messenger for Aldozy telling the man the crisis was averted – for now – and to proceed safely out of the complex. Harry had one last thing to take care of.

He undid his temporary walls and returned the nullifier necklace to his neck.

He walked back up the complex, back to the control room with all the horcruxes tucked away. He was sweating now and wheezing like an asthmatic.

He transfigured a piece of fallen stone into a large bag and summoned the horcruxes into the bag. He should just destroy them in situ, but he wanted to study this room in the future. He backtracked a mile back into the complex and found a boring, unadorned room. No interesting texts on the walls, no runes of any sort. Harry dropped the bag inside and summoned up Fiendfyre.

This time the sentient flames fought him for control.

Harry hung on long enough to destroy every last statue, but it was a near thing. Very near.

He took two hours to walk out and collapsed in the sand when he smelled fresh air. Tracey Davis was the first one at his side.

"It's done."

"What happened?" she asked.

Harry was already unconscious so she'd have to wait for her answer.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The next morning was beyond unpleasant. Teddy was pissed he'd missed out; Harry promised to show his godson what happened in a pensieve the next time they were both at Grimmauld Place.

His team had demanded explanations, too.

Now, nearing lunch, he found a copy of the local non-magical newspaper. He felt sick. Devastated.

Terrorist Attack at the Valley of the Kings; 357 Dead

Unknown Gas Attack Used

The priests had reached out with their magic and plucked the lives of more than three hundred humans to reembody themselves. The nullifier necklaces had probably kept the technique from working against Harry and his team, otherwise there would be magical Egyptian priests walking the world right now – with no one the wiser about them and no one prepared to stop them.

That idea sent one long chill down Harry's spine.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The Muggles never found out about the magical attack from three thousand year old priests. Harry let them think it was unknown terrorists. God knows how many groups stepped forward to claim credit.

The Magical governments of Egypt and the International paid it no notice.

Harry and his team skated on what they'd caused.

It took three more years of excavation, documentation, and analysis before Harry was ready to publish his book. He'd trashed everything he'd shown Hermione Weasley so many years before. The new book was called The Egyptian Birth of All Magic.

It caused immediate outrage. British wizards believed all decent magic came from Merlin and those who followed him, although some who followed Celtic traditions were willing to believe in older magics, but only if they came from their island. The Asian mages had stories that traced it all back to various of their ancestors. Native American practitioners had their stories, too, as did the mages from the Indian sub-continent, those self-described descendents of Mora the Tempter.

Harry's thesis was that everything came from the Egyptian priest-mage. The Daily Prophet in London excerpted some of the wilder suggestions:

The Two School of Priest-Mages, p. 3 - 76

The first school of magic was founded four centuries before what is called the Old Kingdom. Priest-mages concentrated their magical studies on astronomy, agricultural enhancement, religious divination, and immortality techniques.

The first school ended within a century of the collapse of the Old Kingdom. Two hundred miles to the south a second school started around the time of the New Kingdom. It had some of the materials and records created by the first school, but it used vastly different practices to work with and control the non-magical pharaohs they supposedly served. They focused their researches on architecture, magical runes used for traps, external expressions of magical power similar to what we think of as spells or Charms, and transmutations of substances.

These priests survived to the present day hiding in secret places. They had not been actively recruiting and training new priests for the last seventeen hundred years, however.

The Origins of the Killing Curse, p. 77 - 84

The first spell developed in the second school was the ancestor of the modern Killing Curse. For a time, priest-mages took to the battlefields to aid their pharaohs in combat. They developed lethal spells to do so. The first one destroyed the 'ka' of any human or creature it touched.

The Original Philosopher's Stone – Called Punt, p. 85 - 108

The semi-mythical land of Punt wasn't a land at all, but the name of priestly magical device that could transform sand into precious materials, such as gold, ivory, and precious stones. The pharaohs didn't know this, of course, so they sent many trading expeditions to Punt.

In reality, the priests would take the offered goods, transfigure sand into the desired trade items, and return them to the traders on their boats. On occasion the priests would drown one or more party members or destroy the entire convoy to make the journey seem more difficult and, thus, more worthwhile.

The transfiguration device was extensively documented in several priestly tomb complexes. The author of this book has successfully created one. It does not have the same life-extending property that Nicholas Flamel's Philosopher's Stone was rumored to possess.

The Use of the Gods in Dream-Visions for the Pharaoh, p. 109 - 143

The priest-mages conducted secret religious services for the pharaoh. The pharaoh would meet each of the principal gods on a date relevant to the god's birth or history.

In fact, the priest-mages constructed automatons and controlled them through magical runes. The author was privileged to witness the sixty-foot tall mechanisms created to reproduce Osiris, Anubis, Bastet, and Wadjet.

Through the use of priest-controlled gods, among other control techniques, the pharaohs would do precisely what the priestly class ordered them to do. Uncontrollable pharaohs could be killed by the early version of the Killing Curse, making it look like a divine punishment.

The Creation of a Magical Language, p. 144 - 195

The runes the priest-mages created were powered by the magic user who, intentionally or inadvertently, engaged them. Unlike modern runes which can be powered up when created or set to draw upon natural magical energies, Egyptian runes required a magic user's presence.

The Role in Agriculture and Weather for Egyptian Magic, p. 196 - 244

The majority of first school magical techniques were focused on agriculture and weather control. Modern non-magical historians hold that the annual flooding of the Nile informed most of the religion in the area: driving sacrifices to ensure good flood and voluntary service to the pharaoh for public building projects.

The priest-mages, in fact, created the floods to enhance agriculture. From time to time, to humble a wayward pharaoh, they would let the floods fail to provide ideal agricultural conditions, causing

widespread famine. A few years of that was enough to force almost every pharaoh to hew closer to his priestly advisors.

The rituals the priests used are well documented even now inside at least four of the tomb complexes. The author and several colleagues enacted one of the rituals and got the precise results expected from the ritual: a Nile that flooded even with the extensive dams and flood control provisions in place.

The Origins of Enchanting, p. 245 - 323

Egyptian enchanting techniques far outshine modern enchanting methods. It is not yet possible to reconstruct the methods used because the rune sets involved are not yet completely deciphered. Several caches of enchanted items have been found in the temple complexes and they still work as well as the day they were made.

Waiting for the First Prophecy, p. 324 - 344

The priest-mages dabbled in prophetic decipherment. One such prophecy held that the priest-mages would eventually become lords of that which they had once only aided the pharaohs in ruling. As a result, a group of nearly four hundred priest-mages went into hiding near the end of the New Kingdom.

They sent out emissaries every few hundred years to determine if the conditions for their prophecy were met.

It was necessary to destroy these dangerous priest-mages. Several of their number, who had been detained prior to finding the main body, are in magical stasis and may provide help in the future deciphering some of the ongoing mysteries concerning five thousand years of Egyptian magic.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry Potter, at age 58, returned to Britain for the last time. He walked onto the grounds of Hogwarts, paid his respects to the retired Headmistress Minerva McGonagall, and took a seat at the back of the crowd. Teddy Lupin joined him a few minutes later. He handed his godson a special piece of paper. Once Teddy memorized the phrase upon it, the paper went up in flames.

"You really did it, Harry?"

Harry nodded at Teddy. "I did. You'll always be able to come and visit, if you want."

"I don't know that Felice would like that."

"Bring her along, stay in a hotel."

Teddy laughed. "She's very British."

"You can do better, then."

Teddy shrugged. "The sex is the best I've had."

"Come visit anyway. I have some things you might like to see."

"You finally going to let me into that tomb complex?" The famed one that almost no one had ever gone inside.

"Yes."

They settled into comfortable silence while the seats filled. The funeral today was for Filius Flitwick.

Hermione and her daughter were up near the front. Ron and his son were nowhere to be seen.

Three former Ministers of Magic were there as was the current one, Dennis Creevey, who had lost his brother Colin on these grounds. He was the first Muggleborn Minister for Magic since 1623.

The current Hogwarts Headmaster, who had replaced Flitwick at Charms when he retired, spoke for a few minutes. Then Dennis Creevey spoke, followed by a handful of the man's other students.

Flitwick was due to be buried at a family plot near the Cotswolds, but he merited a service on the Hogwarts grounds.

Harry chatted with dozens of people, some of whom were still angry with him about his books on Egyptian magic. A few of the people who were intrigued by Harry's discoveries inquired about joining the exploration team.

Harry had to shake his head. He'd permanently disbanded his team three years earlier – and given each of the remaining team members a couple hundred thousand galleons each.

He had one last book to publish that he was struggling through even now. Hermione and he had long since parted ways when he revealed a few of the things that hadn't made it into the books, like the cause of so many muggle deaths.

He put 12 Grimmauld Place, now in a fashionable part of London, on the market after stripping the magic from it. He had long since helped Teddy buy a smaller, but nicer home in Essex. Harry packed up his warehouses in Bethnal Green and Birmingham and returned to Egypt for good.

He had built himself a tomb complex using the ancient methods. He had himself a horcrux, too, made using a ritual described in the horcrux chamber. He had had to use his old friend Tracey Davis as his sacrifice, but only she became fixated on Harry as her husband number eleven (he'd finally accumulated enough wealth to attract her romantic attentions, apparently).

Every morning he woke up and looked out at the Valley of the Kings, all seven valleys. Five of them were under a reworked Fidelius Charm that wouldn't break until Harry's horcrux was destroyed.

Of course, it was next to impossible to destroy the horcrux Harry had chosen to make. He had bound his soul to the entirety of the Great Pyramid Peak.

It would take a hundred thousand wizards casting a thousand Killing Curses to even make a dent on it.

Harry smiled as he read the Egyptian prophecy again.

It was a rough translation but the third stanza was clear enough:

The Lightning Child will arrive

Clear out the unfaithful

And make the Magic of the Gods

Real once again – and forever

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X